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141633Z Jun 05

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	DOEE-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	EUR-00	H-00	TEDE-00
	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	M-00	DCP-00	NRC-00
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OIC-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	MCC-00
	GIWI-00	PRS-00	P-00	FMPC-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	SCRS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00
	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W		

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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1778
INFO AMEMBASSY ABUJA
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY KAMPALA
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L NDJAMENA 000932

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, DRL, INR, LONDON AND PARIS FOR
AFRICAWATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CD](#)

SUBJECT: LIFTING TERM LIMITS: WHAT IF YOU HELD A REFERENDUM
AND NO ONE CAME?

REF: NDJAMENA 902

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Kathleen FitzGibbon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: The low voter turn-out for the public referendum on June 6 is still reverberating throughout Chad's political arena. For now, Chad's political players are preoccupied with digesting and explaining what happened and determining which way forward. President Deby, the ruling party, and the CENI are grappling with the public's vote of no-confidence. Chad's political opposition leaders, press, and armed opponents are reveling in the government's failure to mobilize Chadian voters despite a large expenditure of cash. For the political opposition, the referendum process could increase its leverage with the government and the public if it can unite. The political fall-out from the referendum could possibly include a cabinet reshuffle and ruling party make-over as well as increased harassment of political opponents and journalists. The Chadian public and political players anxiously await the public announcement of the results on June 21. End Summary.

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FOR DEBY
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2. (C) Various sources have told us that the low voter turn-out shocked President Idriss Deby because he viewed the referendum as a measure of his popularity and an evaluation of his government's performance. A former Prime Minister's advisor said that the referendum was a significant blow because it demonstrated that if Deby ran for a third term, he might not win a free election. The President voted near Farcha, on the outskirts of N'Djamena. Reportedly, he was surprised to see that at 8:30 a.m., there were no voters at the polling stations he passed. In an interview on June 6, the President remarked that the political opposition's call for a boycott of the referendum undermined the democratic process. The opposition should have encouraged Chadians to vote whether they voted "yes" or "no", according to Deby. The President reportedly recalled ministers and party officials to N'Djamena for an explanation of the low turn-out and the whereabouts of the money they were given to encourage the "oui massif". Rumors of an impending cabinet reshuffle abound, but it is not clear who will depart and when. Finally, some observers say that the low turn-out also was an indication of the unpopularity of Zaghawa rule and could provoke some discussion within the President's family over the best route to maintaining power.

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FOR CENI
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3. (C) The low turn-out makes the vote counting--and its

manipulation--more difficult. Embassy observers and contacts in N'Djamena, Mousoro, and Abeche estimated that only twenty percent of the voters turned out. In addition, informal observation of the discarded ballots indicate that many Chadians who did vote, voted no. This means that the CENI stands to lose credibility if the announced results are greater than observed turn-out and reflect a "oui massif". A blatant rigging of the results will discourage participation in future elections. CENI will also need to correct technical irregularities in the run-up to the communal elections, tentatively set for October.

FOR THE RULING PARTY

14. (SBU) Poor participation also reflects the ineffectiveness of the ruling party. Pre-referendum rallies, political advertisements, banners, parades and rallies, and ministerial campaigning are signs that government and the party put significant resources into the campaign with little results. In the immediate days after the referendum, ruling Movement for Patriotic Salvation party officials scrambled to explain the disappointing turn-out. Initially, MPS Secretary General Mahamat Hissene claimed there was a 65 percent

turnout in some areas. Hissene and others have since changed their "spin", saying that of the voters who voted, over 60 percent voted "yes". He has also tried to justify the results by pointing to the low turn-out in other more advanced democracies.

15. (SBU) Hissene has since been quiet, in sharp contrast to the run-up to the referendum. We have also heard that the President visited MPS headquarters to admonish party officials for misleading him. The ruling party, regardless of the published results, will likely be reconsidering its own policies and strategies prior to its Congress at the end of the year. The refusal of many MPS deputies and governors to campaign for the referendum exposed the level of internal indiscipline and opposition within the party.

FOR OPPOSITION LEADERS

16. (SBU) Chad's fractious political elite is taking credit for the low turn-out, claiming that calls for a boycott of the referendum resulted in low voter participation. However, the public pronouncements of the various political party leaders indicate that government opponents continue to lack a unified strategy towards another term for President Deby. Party leaders risk misinterpreting the low turn-out as being a result of their "leadership" on the issue. Instead, the poor participation was a sign of Chadians' disillusionment with the government unrelated to the opposition's call for a boycott. The opposition's misinterpretation of its own resonance risks missing an opportunity to forge a unified strategy and back a common candidate to capitalize on the widespread anti-regime sentiment evident on June 6. In the past, the government has been able to divide, rule, and coopt opposition leaders at will. The current danger for the opposition is that the Presidency may take it more seriously and opposition activities will be open to more forms of political harassment.

FOR THE PRESS

17. (C) Various government agencies, such as the High Council for Communications and the National Security Agency (ANS), are showing signs of an increasing willingness to limit press freedoms and intimidate opponents. The HCC's closure of Radio Brakkos for the third time and regulations against political advertisements and debates concerning the referendum limited discussion of the government's performance on the country's airwaves, the most effective means of mass communication in Chad. The ANS's arrest and two-day imprisonment of the editor of Observator for publishing an open letter from the Kreda, an ethnic group previously allied with the President, complaining about mistreatment at the hands of the Zaghawa was widely interpreted as a sign of the government's intention to crackdown on its critics. In addition, the independent media has now dubbed the ANS as the regime's "political police". The Minister of Communications also is cracking down on the press, including charging "Le Temps" with libel for publishing what he claims are false photographs of a massacre carried out by Zaghawa in eastern Chad. The independent press is more cohesive than the political opposition and could find itself increasingly targeted and intimidated.

FOR CHADIAN REBELS

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18. (C) Chadian rebel groups based in western Sudan and eastern Chad reportedly view the low-turn out as a sign of Deby's unpopularity. As a result, these groups may feel increasingly empowered and possibly reach out to make political connections in N'Djamena to coordinate their activities. While this is still speculation among our contacts, it bears watching and may be a factor in future actions by the government.

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FOR CHADIANS

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19. (SBU) Average Chadians refused to participate as a sign of their frustration with lack of social services and infrastructure, security, salaries, and the prevailing social discrimination and culture of impunity. Given a pervasive feeling of powerlessness among Chadians, the one way that they could be heard was not to show up at the polls. In effect, most view the low turn-out as a vote of no-confidence in the government. The average Chadian felt that if they went to the polls and voted "no" that their vote would be changed to a "yes". Therefore, by not voting at all, a stronger signal was sent, preventing the government from claiming a high turn-out and thus a strong mandate to continue in power. Some may believe that this public display of widespread dissent could lead to some policy changes. However, most only hope that President and the ruling party heard the message.

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COMMENT

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110. (C) The next steps for Chad's political players will be determined by the results of the referendum, which will be released on June 21. The extent to which the government tries to hide what everyone plainly saw on June 6 will have implications for the course of the next elections. We look forward to the results and knowing if denial really is a river in N'Djamena.

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